John Meares Will Be Remembered . . . On a Little Girl's Advice

TAHSIS HONORS GALLANT SAILOR

The Story of the Coast
By George Nicholson

JOHN Meares, born in 1756, entered the navy in 1771 in board HMS Cruiser, after serving for nearly seven years, was promoted to lieutenant. After the peace of 1783 he took command of a merchant ship for a voyage to India. At Calcutta he formed a company, the Associated Merchants, to develop the northwest American fur trade, which from glowing accounts following Cook's last voyage, had exceedingly bright prospects.

Meares visited Nootka in 1788 with the snows Felice and Iphigenia. Shortly after his arrival, he purchased from Chief Maquinna, for eight or 10 sheets of copper and some trifles, a portion of the shoreline at Friendly Cove. Here he erected a storehouse and also built the North West America, about 40 tons, the first vessel to be built on this coast north of Monteray, Mexico.

Disregarding England's claim to this territory (Cook landed at Nootka in 1778, and was thus the first white man to set foot on these shores) Don Estevan Jose Martinez, a Spanish naval officer who arrived some months later, repudiated this purchase of land, claiming the whole coast for the Spanish crown. He seized Meares' ships, along with two other British vessels, the snow Argonaut and the sloop Princess Royal, placed a prize crew on each and despatched them under escort to Monteray.

PROTESTING the arrest of his ships, Meares travelled overland from Monteray to the Atlantic coast, subsequently arrived in England and appeared in person before the British parliament to press his case. Meanwhile, Spanish troops occupied Nootka, word of which also soon reached England.

The incident almost led to war. However, matters were amicably settled, but only after England, by alerting her fleet for action, had shown the Spanish government that she meant business. The seized ships were forthwith released, and substantial damages paid their owners. The Spanish garrison at Nootka was also withdrawn.

It has been said by some that Meares was a bit of a rogue, inasmuch as when it suited his purpose, his ships are alleged to have displayed the Portugese flag. The propriety of his having purchased a tract of land at Friendly Cove was also questioned.

A letter written by Robert Duffin, first mate of the Felice, is of interest. After being sworn to before Captain George Vancouver, to whom it was addressed, the letter was forwarded (by Vancouver) to the British Admiralty and subsequently deposited in the Records Office, London, where it still may be seen.

In part, it reads as follows:

"To Captain George Vancouver, commander of His Britannic Majesty's ships Discovery and Chatham, now lying in Friendly Cove, Nootka Sound.

"Sir, whereas different reports have been propogated as to Meares' conduct on Nootka Sound, I shall here state, with the candor and veracity which always influenced me on such occasions, an impartial account of Meares' proceedings at the above place.

"Towards the close of 1787, a commercial expedition was undertaken by John Henry Cox, Esq. & Co., merchants, then residing at Macao, who accordingly fitted out and equipped two ships for the fur trade on the northwest coast of America. The management of the expedition was reposed in John Meares Esq. as commander-in-chief and sole conductor of the voyage, and who was likewise one of the merchant proprietors.

"THESE VESSELS were equipped under Portugese colors, with a view to mitigate the heavy port charges imposed on ships of every nation (the Portugese only excepted), which circumstance is well known to all commercial gentlemen trading in that part of the world. Under the circumstances, the vessels were fitted out in the name and under the firm of Juan Cavallo Esq., a Portugese merchant then residing at Macao. Cavallo had no property in them whatsoever, both their cargoes being entirely British property, and the vessels navigated solely by subjects of His Britannic Majesty."

Duffin goes on to say: "On our arrival the first time at Friendly Cove, which was in May, 1788, the two chiefs, Maquilla (Maquinna) and Callicum were absent. On their return, Mr. Meares, accompanied by second officer Robert Funter and myself, went ashore and treated with the said chiefs for the whole of the land that forms Friendly Cove, in His Britannic Majesty's name. He accordingly bought it for eight or ten sheets of copper and several other trifling articles.

"The natives were fully satisfied with the agreement. The chiefs, and likewise the people, did homage to Mr. Meares as their sovereign, using those formalities peculiar to themselves. The British flag was displayed on shore at the same time, not the Portugese flag as has been insinuated by several people who were not present at the time; consequently they advanced those assertions without foundation.

"The chiefs with their subjects offered to quit the cove entirely and reside at another village, and leave the place to ourselves as entire masters and owners of the cove and lands adjacent. Meares had a house built, which he left in Maquilla's care when we departed. On our return in 1789, the cove was found to be occupied by subjects of His Catholic Majesty, Don Estevan Jose Martinez having arrived there in the meantime and claimed the territory for Spain.

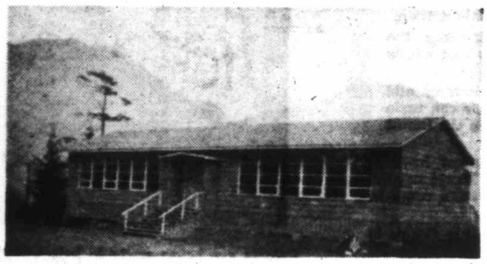
"Captain John Kendrick was also there with the ship Columbia, under the flag and protection of the United States of America. Two days after our arrival at Friendly Cove, Meares' ships, along with the two other British ships (mentioned aforesaid) which were lying there, were captured by Martinez. The Americans (Kendrick) were suffered to carry on trade with the natives unmolested.

"SHOULD ANYONE doubt the truth of this protest, I am always ready to attest it before any court of jurisdiction, or any person authorized to examine me. I have the honor to be, with the greatest esteem, (signed) Robert Duffin."

"That the above was the identical truth was sworn before me this 21st day of September, 1792. (signed) George Vancouver."

Here it might be pointed out, that, to this day, when it suits their purpose, some of our own Canadian ships, along with those of Great Britain, the United States and Greece, evade the shipping regulations enforced by their respective governments, and for cheaper operation costs, by changing registration and flying the flags of such countries as Panama and Paraguay.

It will be remembered also that the Imperial Eagle, Captain Charles William Barkley's ship, although 100 per cent British, was sailing quite legally under Austrian colors when that gentleman discovered and named Barkley Sound.



This is the $30,000 Capt. John Meares Junior-Senior High School at Tahsis.

This is Carol Macleod, who chose the name of her school to honor a gallant trader and explorer of the west coast in earlier days.

Meares was a renowned British seaman, and his name will forever be associated with the early history of this coast. Promoted to the rank of commander in the British navy in February 1795, after several years of retirement he died in 1809. Meares Island, the largest on Clayoquot Sound, where he also did considerable trading, was named after him.

TODAY Meares would find Friendly Cove pretty well much unchanged, except that the Indians now live in modern houses and use gasboats instead of canoes. And he would see big steamers, any one of which could carry his small schooners on deck, passing the cove almost daily. (Friendly Cove is a pilotage station).

Only 20 miles away, at the head of Tahsis inlet, where he often visited with Maquinna, he would find a town of 1,400 in habitants. But what would probably please him most would be the name, JOHN MEARES, emblazoned in bold letters above the main entrance to the town's high school, tangible evidence that, after 170 years, his name is still honored.

Meares would meet 12-year-old Carol Macleod, the grade 7 student who, after reading her history books, suggested that the school be named after him —and thereby won a prize.

The Captain John Meares Junior-Senior High School at Tahsis was officially opened November 16, 1958, by Douglas Abernethy, manager of the Tahsis Company Ltd., after the contractor had handed the key to H. K. Tasker, the official trustee. Several hundred persons were present at the ceremony. Luncheon was provided by the ladies of the Tahsis Parent-Teachers Association.

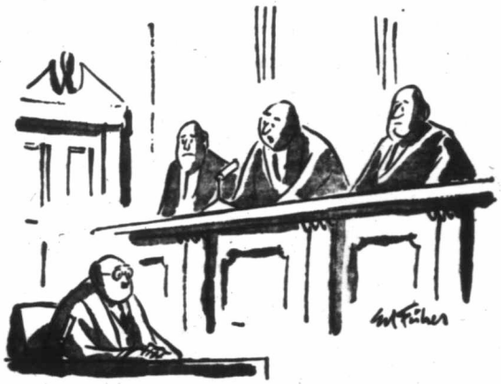
SOBERING THOUGHT

"It is a sobering thought that it is now exceedingly difficult to find a spot where one may pass an hour without seeing or hearing evidence of human enterprise."

Guy Mountfort's rueful statement is all too true. His excellent book **Wild Paradise**, is about one such place —the Coto Donana in southwest Spain.

Here, in an area of uninhabited marshland bounded by the Atlantic, birds, reptiles and animals live a relatively unmolested life. The author tells of two expeditions made to this isolated Spanish sanctuary in 1956 and 1957. (A member of both parties was Britain's wartime military commander, Viscount Alanbrooke, while another was Roger Tory Peterson, noted American ornithologist.)

Reading Mr. Mountfort's account of the expedition's work and their rich haul in observations and photographs, it is clear that the book's title is no exaggeration. The text is written with grace and authority, while the photographs by Eric Hosking are among the best ornithological studies published in years.



"You mean to say you were his analyst for five years and never knew he was paying you out of union funds?"